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ABSTRACT

A discussion of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) conceptualizes ICC based on a review of the literature, details its major components and related propositions, and considers problems in and prospects for, the study of ICC. The literature of both intercultural communication and of communicative competence are examined for commonalities, themes, and conceptual problems. Research on components of ICC is seen as derived from the following perspectives: personality strength; comunication skills; psychological adaptation; and cultural awareness. Eleven propositions and related theorems concerning ICC are outlined. Three challenges presented in the study of ICC are noted. The first of these is the increasing sophistication of its conceptualization and its confusions with the definition of "competence." The second challenge is the operationalization of ICC (what and how to measure). The last challenge concerns how many elements individuals must possess in order to be considered "competent": scholars need to investigate whether the degree of ICC is affected by the number of competent elements or by some other measure. It is concluded that while still very new, the study of ICC is critical to the modern world. (MSE)

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Intercultural Communication Competence: Some Perspectives of Research

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ABSTRACT

The analysis synthesizes the various strands of theory buiding on intercultural communication competence (ICC). Focused propositions are advanced to guide future ICC research.

Intercultural Communication Competence: Some Perspectives of Research

It is almost a truism to say that a competent person will better adapt to a new environment, within the same or a different cultural settings, than a person who is less competent. Even though the study of communication competence can be indirectly traced back to Aristotle's rhetoric, relatively few scholars currently deal with communication competence by considering cultural factors. In other words, there are very surprisingly few studies of intercultural communication competence.

Owing to the involvement of cultural factors, the study of intercultural communication competence becomes much more complicated. Culture, in its broadest sense, is considered as the way of human life in a group that includes "knowledge, belief, act, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor, 1958, p. 1). Because some consider this definition of culture to be too inclusive, Stewart (1978) offers a more specific conceptualization of culture as "the cognitive process serving as the background of communication," which is "an analytical tool for assessing communication, selecting strategies and evaluating results" which serves as "a filter for communication" (p. 299). This indicates that different cultures generate distinctive value systems and perceptions of meaning.

Because communication carries values and meanings, and the way people communicate is influenced by the values they hold and the

way they perceive meaning (Sitaram, & Lawrence, 1979), it is sufficient to say that communication systems differ from society to society. This makes the study of intercultural communication more intricate. Because the culture where a person resides determines an individual's communication competence, it is important to investigate "the breadth and depth of the impact of culture on communication behavior, and the salience of particular communication behavior to members of different cultures" (Cooley & Roach, 1984, p. 14).

Basically, intercultural communication competence not only examines human communication but also investigates interaction between people and the environment in which they sojourn. It is then the purpose of this paper to examine some perspectives on this topic by developing a definition and a series of propositions of intercultural communication competence (ICC). More specifically, this paper contains three major sections. The analysis first conceptualizes ICC; second, it details major components and propositions concerning ICC. Third, the paper considers problems and prospects in the study of ICC.

A Conceptualization of ICC

Although recent studies have moved intercultural communication forward in its theoretical and practical orientations, yet there is no denying that it remains a young field. The study of intercultural communication dates to the works of political scientists and anthropologists in the 1930s and 1940s. More recently, sociologists, linguists, and communication scholars have

developed interest in it. Consequently, two separate schools of though--cultural dialogue and cultural critic--have guided research in intercultural communication (Asante, Newmark, & Blake, 1979).

The cultural dialogue school argues that their theories can be utilized to promote world understanding; they believe people from different cultures could and should communicate with others. Therefore, the school empathsizes internationalism and humanism, and considers intercultural communication an attempt to organize human society.

On the other hand, cultural critics try to pose researchable questions by isolating the conflict found in cross-cultural communication. They attempt to seek ways of improving interaction among people across cultures by eliminating barriers through classificatory, analytic, and applicative steps. According to Asante, Newmark, and Blake (1979), cultural critics attempt to identify intercultural communication barriers "in terms of priority, intensity, or difficulty," and to apply the results to specific instances of intercultural interaction.

Both schools of thought have led to a significant amount of research in the field of intercultural communication. One of the main topics studied by the two groups is ICC. Only through ICC can people move beyond cultural differences to reach the ideal goals advocated by cultural dialogists and cultural critics.

But "What is communication competence?" One of the early studies of communication competence is provided by White (1959). White considers competence "an organism's capacity to interact

effectively with its environment" (p. 297). He argues that competence is the common property of behaviors, and this competence can be reached through "behaviors instigated by drives" in their own rights (p. 329). White suggests that competence is one of the basic needs of people, and the measure of competence depends on the extent to which a person produces the intended effect from interaction with the environment. Argyris (1965a, 1965b) agrees with White's ideas and further indicates that human competence tends to increase under three conditions: "(1) As one's awareness of relevant factors increases, (2) as the problems are solved in such a way that they [remain] solved, and (3) with a minimal deterioration of the problem-solving process" (1965a, p. 59).

Foote and Cottrell (1955), and Holland and Baird (1968) simply conceptualizes communication competence as the "acquired ability for effective interaction" (p. 53). Unlike White's conception, they claim that communication competence is an inherent trait that is not related to personal intellect and education. However, Weinstein (1969) theorizes that communication competence is increased through socialization, and that it is learned incidentally rather than manipulatively. Weinstein perceives communication competence as "the ability to accomplish [an] interpersonal task" (p. 755). This definition not only views competence as the ability to manipulate the interaction, but it also relates to personal goals. Weinstein further indicates that communication competence stems primarily from empathy, while empathy builds upon personal intelligence and sensitivity.

Trying to outline a more systematic concept of communication competence, Bochner and Kelly (1974) conceptually defines communication competence as "the ability to relate effectively to self and others" (p. 280). This definition broadens the concept of communication competence to both interactants. That is, to be competent, the individuals must not only feel they are competent but their ability should be observable and recognized by their counterparts. This definition also suggests that communication competence can be judged by "(1) ability to formulate and achieve objectives, (2) ability to collaborate effectively with others, and (3) ability to adapt appropriately to situational or environmental variation" (p. 288).

In the same vein, Parks (1976) examines communication competence from the viewpoint of goal attainment. In his opinion, an ideal competent communicator should be able to maximize his or her personal goal attainment. Accordingly, Parks defines communication competence as "the communicator's ability to control or manipulate his or her environment in order to attain personal goals" (p. 5). Furthermore, in order to maximize these personal goals, one must be able to identify these goals, get relevant information about them, accurately predict the other's responses, select communication strategies, implement these communication strategies, and accurately assess the interaction results.

Recently, Rubin (1983) theoretically applies communication competence to the four perspectives of interpersonal communication study proposed by Miller (1978). After examining the four

perspective--the situational approach, the developmental approach, the law-governed approach, and the rules-governed approach--Rubin argues that "communication competence is an impression based on perception" (p. 1), and these impressions are formed about both one's own and other's behaviors. Through these impressions one can draw inferences about interactants' internal states. In Rubin's opinion, to know whether a communicator is competent, the other's observation becomes an indispensable element.

Finally, Wiemann (1977) synthesizes the concept of competence from the human relations, social skills, and self-presentation approaches. He conceptualizes communicative competence as "the ability of an interactant to choose among available communicative behaviors in order that he [sic] may successfully accomplish his own interpersonal goals during an encounter while maintaining the face and line of his fellow interactants within the constraints of the situation" (p. 198). This definition obviously argues that competent communication is other-oriented, and, at the same time, that communicators have to successfully accomplish their own goals. All these conceptualizations focus on perceived effectiveness in an interaction.

While some scholars have conceptualized communication competence as a function of perceived effectiveness, others have looked at communication competence from the viewpoint of appropriateness. For example, Backlund (1978) reviewes the various definitions of communication competence and conceptualized communication competence as "the ability to demonstrate a knowledge of the

socially appropriate communicative behavior in a given situation" (p. 26). Wiemann and Backlund (1980) explain appropriateness in the communication process as follows:

> Appropriateness generally refers to the ability of an interactant to meet the basic contextual requirements of the situation--to be effective in a general sense.... These contextual requirements include: (1) The verbal context, that is, making sense in terms of wording, of statements, and of topic; (2) the relationship context, that is, the structuring, type and style of messages so that they are consonant with the particular relationship at hand; and (3) the environmental context, that is, the consideration of constraints imposed on message making by the symbolic and physical environments. (p. 191)

They refer to the "appropriateness of behavior" as one of the most important criteria to conceptualize communication competence.

Trenholm and Rose (1981) argue that one of the major abilities needed in an interaction is "the ability to recognize how context constrains communication" (p. 13). In other words, "in order to act and speak appropriately, individuals must recognize that different situations give rise to different sets of rules; compliance and noncompliance separate those who 'belong' from those who do not 'fit in'" (p. 13). This is similar to the definition of organizational communication competence set forth by Harris and Cronen (1976) where understanding of organizational rules constitute their criteria for competence.

Getter and Nowinski (1981) likewise utilize appropriate responses in interaction to evaluate communication competence. They suggest that a competent communicator should be able to avoid inappropriate responses. The inappropriate response to a situation is defined as "one which is unnecessarily abrasive, intense, or

bizarre. It is also likely to result in negative consequences which could have been averted, without sacrifice of the goal, by more appropriate actions" (p. 303).

In another study, Allen and Wood (1978) indicate that the functions of communication include controlling, sharing feelings, informing, ritualizing, and imagining. In order to fulfill these functions, a competent communicator must know how to act appropriately. This argues that appropriateness is the main criterion for conceptualizing communication competence. The authors further extend the meaning of appropriateness in interaction as "(1) Say just enough--not too little or too much. (2) Don't say something that's false--or speak about something for which you lack evidence. (3) Relate your contribution to the topic and situation. (4) Be clear about what you are saying, and say it 'with dispatch'" (p. 290). This includes the four elements of appropriateness: Quantity, quality, relevancy, and manner of message-sending in interaction.

Finally, Lee (1979) indicates that competence is a dynamic process that translates one's cognitive, linguistic, and social abilities into appropriate strategies in interpersonal interaction. Lee defines competence as "the ability to draw on one's capabilities and social knowledge and combine them for lines of action or strategies in functionally appropriate ways" (p. 795).

In sum, appropriateness should be considered when one conceptualizes communication competence, and "the fundamental criteria of appropriateness are that the interactants perceive that

they understand the content of the encounter and have not had their norms and rules violated too extensively" (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984, p. 101).

Most of the literature shows that the conceptualization of ICC is similar to the above-mentioned definitions (Hammer, 1989). The only difference is, in addition to looking at communication competence as effective and appropriate interaction, intercultural communication scholars place more emphasis on environmental factors. They conceptualize communication competence not only as effective and appropriate interaction between people, but as effective and appropriate interaction between people and the environment in which the people sojourn. This orientation is similar to those communication scholars who place emphasis on competence as context-specific behavior (e.g., Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984).

While researchers conceive of communication competence as the ability to interact effectively and appropriately with others, their definitions suffer, more or less, a certain degree of ambiguity, confusion, and imprecision. For example, from Wiemann's (1977) synthesized definition, the question arises: What constitutes "available behaviors," or "constraints of the situation?" These concepts are not clear, and require definition. To allevitate problem of definition of communication competence and to apply the concept to intercultural setting, ICC might be conceptualized as "the ability to effectively and appropriately execute communication behaviors to elicit a desired response in a

specific environment." This definition shows that competent persons must not only know how to interact effectively and appropriately with people and environment, but also know how to fulfill their own communication goals through this ability.

Components and propositions of ICC

In order to be able to execute communication behaviors to elicit a desired response in interaction, communication scholars have tried to find out what constitute these effective and appropriate communication behaviors. Historically, according to Dinges (1983), there are six approaches attempting to investigate this question. First, the overseasmanship approach, represented by Cleveland, Mangone, and Adams (1960), attempts to identify common factors in effective performance when one sojourns in another culture. A competent person must have the ability to develop versatility through a variety of experience that can show the person's effective technical skills.

Second, the subjective culture and isomorphic attribution approach requires a competent person to have the ability to understand the causes of interactants' behaviors in order to reward them appropriately, and to suitably modify their behaviors according to the demands of the setting (Triandis, 1976, 1977). This ability of understanding must be based on accurate cognitions of the differences in cognitive structures between cultures.

Third, the multicultural approach emphasizes that a competent person must be able to adapt to the exceedingly difficult circumstances by transcending usual daptative limits (Adler, 1975,

1977). Those abilities include to move in and out of contexts, to maintenance coherence in different situations, and to be dynamic.

Fourth, the social behaviorism and culture learning approach indicates that the successful intercultural coping strategies are more dependent on predeparture experiences such as training and sojourning in another country rather than the person's inherent characteristics or personality (Guthrie, 1975). In other words, a competent person must be able to learn discriminative stimuli in obtaining social rewards, and to avoid punishments that create hardship in intercultural interaction (David, 1972).

Fifth, the typological approach tries to develop different models of ICC. Most of the models focus on sojourners' behavioral styles on a continuum from most to least effective. For example, Brislin (1981) proposes that a successful intercultural interaction must be based on the sojourner's attitudes, traits, and social skills. According to Brislin (1981), the major attitudes for effective intercultural interaction are nonethnocentrism and nonprejudicial judgments. The major adaptative personal traits include personality strength, intelligence, tolerant personality, social relations, potential for benefit, and task oriented. Lastly, the social skills consist of knowledge of subject and language, positive orientation to opportunities, effective communication skills, and the ability to use personal traits and to complete tasks.

Finally, the intercultural communicators approach emphasizes that the successful intercultural interaction is based on

communication process between people from different cultures. In other words, a competent person must show the ability to establish interpersonal relationship by understanding their counterparts through the effective exchange of verbal and nonverbal behaviors (Hall, 1959, 1966, 1976).

The six approaches show a wide range within the study of ICC. The purpose of this section is to summarize some of the major components of ICC, and furthermore propose propositions about ICC. Some of the propositions proposed here have been supported from recent empirical studies, however, most derive from extant literature, and need to have further confirmation in the future.

Research about components of ICC can be roughly examined from four perspectives: personality strength, communication skills, psychological adaptation, and cultural awareness (Abe & Wiseman, 1983; Chen, 1989; Hammer, 1987, 1988, 1989; Harris, 1977; Hawes & Kealey, 1979, 1981; Hwang, et al., 1980; Martin, 1987; Smith, 1966; Spitzberg, 1988; Wiseman & Abe, 1984).

Personality strength refers to a person's traits that constitute his or her personality. Traits are products of an individual's unique experiences within a culture, and are always affected by the person's heredity. Personal traits usually play an important role in determining the process of interaction (Brislin, 1981; Harris, 1977; Hawes & Kealey, 1979; Smith, 1966). The main personal traits that affect ICC include self-concept, self-disclosure, self-monitoring, and social relaxation.

Self-concept refers to the way in which a person views the self.

It is not only the key to communication but is probably also instrumental to relate to the world (Ting-Toomey, 1989). One of the most important elements of self-concept is self-esteem. It has been found that the behaviors of high self-esteem individuals and low self-esteem individuals are significantly different in communication process. These differences were summarized by Adler and Towne (1987). For instance, persons with high self-esteem, when compared to persons with low self-esteem, are more likely to think well of others, to be accepted by other, to perform well when being watched, to feel more comfortable when working with superiors, and to be able to defend themselves against negative comments of others.

Ehrlich (1973) also indicated that people with high self-esteem are more likely to feel positively toward out-group members than do people with low self-esteem. In an intercultural encounter, since people will inevitably meet psychological stresses when they try to complete their job and establish a relationship with others, self-esteem becomes an important variable to decide whether they can fulfill the need or not.

Other aspects of self-concept that affect communication have been discussed by various scholars. For examples, Foote and Cottrell (1955) indicated that a competent person must have an optimistic outlook. This kind of optimism would give a person confidence in interaction with others. Gardner (1962) suggested that a stable and extroverted personality is the way to be effective in intercultural communication. Another study by Harris

(1973) shows that personality traits such as self-reliance, perseverance, and reliability are account for one of the dimensions of ICC. To summarize the relationship between self-concept and ICC:

> Proposition 1: Individuals with high positive self-concept are more likely to be competent in intercultural communication than are individuals with low positive self-concept.

Self-disclosure refers to willingness of the individuals to openly and appropriately reveal information about themselves to their counterparts. According to Adler and Towne (1987), self-disclosure must be intentional, and information revealing to others must be significant and not known by others. Bochner and Kelly (1974) and Parks (1976) have pointed out that self-disclosure is one of the main elements for individuals being competent in communication. Parks (1976) further argues that self-disclosure can lead a person to achieve communication goals.

When interacting with people from different cultures, the uncertainty level is normally high because of the ambiguous situation. It can be predicted that in order to reduce the uncertainty level, disclosing oneself would be a common means to satisfy this need. Chen's (1989) study has shown that self-disclosure is one of the dimension of ICC, especially the depth and breadth of self-disclosure. This finding can illustrate the social penetration model in which Altman and Taylor (1973) mention that relationships develop from superficial to more personal level through the depth and breadth of information the individuals disclose to their counterparts. However,

self-disclosure must be regulated by the norm of appropriateness. To summarize the key point succinctly:

> Proposition 2: Individuals with an appropriate degree of self-disclosure are more likely to be competent in intercultural communication than are individuals with an inappropriate degree of self-disclosure.

Self-monitoring is individuals' ability to possess the "requisite information necessary to implement conversationally competent behavior" (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984, p. 23). According to Snyder (1974), a high self-monitoring person is always particularly sensitive to their counterparts' expression and self-presentation and knows how to use these behavioral cues to guide his or her own self-presentation. The high self-monitoring is characteristically by elements such as:

> (1) Concern with social appropriateness of one's self-presentation. (2) Attention to social comparison information as cues to situationally appropriate expressive self-presentation. (3) The ability to control and modify one's self-presentation and expressive behavior. (4) The use of this ability in particular situations. (5) The extent to which one's expressive behavior and self-presentation are tailored and molded to particular situation. (Snyder, 1979, p. 184)

Berger and Douglas (1982)indicate that persons with high self-monitoring are more likely to be able to adapt their behavior to different situations and to present themselves in interaction. Their results lead Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) to include self-monitoring as one of the elements of relational competence. To summarize, the relationship between self-monitoring and ICC is as follows:

> Proposition 3: Individuals with higher self-monitoring are more likely to be competent in intercultural communication than are individuals with lower

self-monitoring.

Social relaxation refers to the ability to reveal low level of anxiety in communication. Gudykunst and Hammer (1988) assume that a series of crises usually appear in the initial experience of sojourners in the host culture. In other words, in the first period of sojourning in the host culture, individuals would experience anxiety. This feeling of anxiety, according to Herman and Schield (1961), originates from the lack of security which is the immediate psychological result when one is in a new situation.

The symptoms of social anxiety include undue perspiration, shakiness, postural rigidity, vocal smoothless, and lessened response tendencies (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). This is similar to Wiemann's (1977) suggestion that competent individuals must know how to handle behaviors such as rocking movement, leg and foot movements, body lean, speech rate, speech disturbances, hesitations, and nonfluencies. Finally, Barna (1979) also indicates that to be effective in intercultural communication the individual must have the ability to eliminate intercultural communication stumbling blocks. One of the stumbling blocks is a feeling of anxiety when communicating with people from different cultures. All these show the important role social relaxation plays in intercultural interaction. In sum, a proposition can be generated as follows:

Proposition 4: Individuals with higher degree of social relaxation are more likely to be competent in intercultural communication than are individuals with lower degree of social relaxation.

Communication skills refer to verbal and nonverbal behaviors

that lead individuals to be effective in interaction. Those effective behaviors in intercultural communication include message skills, behavioral flexibility, interaction management, and social skills.

Message skills require individuals to show not only the ability of understanding the host language but also the knowledge how to use it. Studies from communication scholars have shown the significance of message skills. For example, Chomsky (1965) emphasizes linguistic competence that pertains to the knowledge of rules underlying the use of language. Parks (1976) indicates that competent persons must be able to code skillfully or create messages in the process of communication, and Barna (1979) further suggests that a good understanding of the interactant's language and the ability to recognize the meaning of nonverbal behavior are two major elements of ICC. Other studies from Sewell and Davidsen (1956), Morris (1960), Deutsch and Won (1963), and Selltiz et al. (1963) as well show that one's fluency in the host language is the key element in being effective in an intercultural interaction.

Besides language itself, message skills include the ability to use descriptive and supporting messages in the process of interaction. Descriptiveness is the way to use concrete and specific feedback instead of putting the emphasis on judging another's behaviors. This will avoid defensive feeling from one's counterpart (Bochner & Kelly, 1974; Gibb, 1961). Supportiveness is the sine qua non for being an effective communicator. It requires individuals to know how to effectively support or reward others in

communication by cues such as head nod, eye contact, facial expression and physical proximity (Parks, 1976; Ruben, 1976, 1977; Wiemann, 1977). In sum, the key point is as follows:

Proposition 5: Individuals with message skills are more likely to be competent in intercultural communication than individuals without message skills.

Three theorems can be derived from proposition 5 as follows:

Theorem 1: Individuals with ability in the host language are more likely to be competent in intercultural communication than are individuals without ability in the host language.

Theorem 2: Individuals with the ability to be descriptive in the process of message-sending are more likely to be competent in intercultural communication than are individuals without ability of descriptiveness.

Theorem 3: Individuals with the ability to be supportive in the process of message-sending are more likely to be competent in intercultural communication than are individuals without the ability of supportiveness.

Behavioral flexibility is the ability to select an appropriate behavior in different context and situations (Bochner & Kelly, 1974). This conceptualization is identical to Parks' (1976) creativity or the flexibility dimension of communication competence. Parks indicates that a behaviorally flexible person must demonstrate the abilities of accuracy and adaptability when attending to information, and must be able to perform different behavioral strategies in order to achieve communication goals.

Martin (1987) and Wiemann (1977) also proposes behavioral flexibility as one dimension of communication competence. According to Wiemann, behavioral flexibility is expressed through verbal immediacy cues in which a person knows how to use different

kind of intimate verbal behaviors to establish interpersonal relationships. Moreover, behavior flexible persons must be good at "the alternation and co-occurrence of specific speech choices which mark the status and affiliative relationships of interactants" (p. 199).

Finally, Wheeless and Duran (1982) point out that, except for being flexible in verbal and nonverbal behaviors, behavioral flexibility must include feeling comfortable while interacting with people from different cultures. To summarize, the key point is as follows:

> Proposition 6: Individuals with higher degree of behavioral flexibility are more likely to be competent in intercutlural communication than are individuals with lower degree of behavioral flexibility.

Interaction management concerns the ability to take turns in a conversation and to appropriately initiate and terminate a conversation. In other words, it deals with the ability of individuals to "handle the procedural aspects of structuring and maintaining a conversation" (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984, p. 46). This mainly implies knowing how to develop a topic smoothly in interaction.

According to Ruben (1976), individuals with good skills of interaction management are "extremely concerned with providing equal opportunity for all participants to share in contribution to discussion" (p. 351). Ruben has included interaction management as one of the major dimensions in his Intercultural Behavioral Assessment Indices that measure ICC.

In a similar vein, Wiemann (1977) suggestes that, to be

effective in interaction, an individual must understand: (1) interruptions are not permitted, (2) only one person is allowed to talk at a time, (3) speaker's turns should appropriately interchange, and (4) speakers should pay full attention to one's counterpart.

Interaction involvement is a variable that is very close to interaction management. Interaction involvement concerns the degree to which an individual "perceives the topic, situation, or other to involve his or her conception of self and self-reward" (Spitzber & Cupach, 1984, p. 120). It mainly emphasizes a person's empathic and other-oriented ability in interaction. Cegala (1981, 1984) considers interaction involvement to be a fundamental element in the interpersonal communication process. His study shows that interaction involvement comprises three major factors: responsiveness, perceptiveness, and attentiveness. The three factors are also found to be related to Wiemann's (1977) five dimensions of communication competence, and relate to concepts such as extroversion, neuroticism, self-consciousness, and communication apprehension. All these show that interaction involvement is a necessary ability for individuals to be competent in interaction. To summarize the two key points as follows:

Proposition 7: Individuals with ability in interaction management are more likely to be competent in intercultural communication than are individuals without ability in interaction management.

Proposition 8: Individuals with ability in interaction involvement are more likely to be competent in intercultural communication than are individuals without ability in interaction involvement.

Three theorems can be derived from proposition 8 as follows:

Theorem 4: Individuals with the ability of responsiveness are more likely to be competent in intercultural communication than are individuals without the ability of responsiveness.

Theorem 5: Individuals with the ability of perceptiveness are more likely to be competent in intercultural communication than are individuals without the ability of perceptiveness.

Theorem 6: Individuals with the ability of attentiveness are more likely to be competent in intercultural communication than are individuals without the ability of perceptiveness.

Communication skills similarly include social skills such as empathy and identity maintenance. Empathy has been long recognized as one of the most important elements for being effective in interpersonal communication. Empathy is the ability to "project oneself into another person's point of view so as momentarily to think the same thoughts and feel the same emotions as the other person" (Adler & Towne, 1987, p. 95). It is the ability to feel inside the other's mind or to put one's feet in another person's shoes. It is also called "affective sensitivity" (Campbell, Kagan, & Drathwohl, 1971), "telepathic or intuition sensitivity" (Gardner, 1962), and "perspective-taking" (Parks, 1976).

According to Parks (1976), an empathic person must demonstrate "the ability to accurately predict or discriminate various aspects of the others' behavior or internal states" (p. 14). Obviously, this is similar to Ruben's (1976, 1977) indication that a highly empathic individual usually responds accurately to other's feelings and thoughts. In addition, Wiemann (1976) further mentions that the ability of empathy should include reciprocity of affect

displays, verbal response showing understanding, and active listening. Hwang, Chase, & Kelly (1980) also view empathy as one of the elements that accounts for ICC.

Identity maintenance is a learned capacity which is the ability of individuals to maintain their counterpart's identity. Because the need to learn who we are is one of the reasons why we want to communicate with others, competent persons not only need to understand themselves in interaction but also need to let their counterparts know who they are. Thus, in order to keep the interaction going smoothly, competent persons must know how to maintain their counterparts' identity. Parks (1976) mentions that individuals usually learn the ability of identity maintenance through their experience, and the use of identity maintenance skills must be changeable according to different situations and different personal goals. In sum, a proposition is as follows:

Proposition 9: Individuals with social skills are more likely to be competent in intercultural communication than are individuals without message skills.

Two theorems can be derived from proposition 9 as follows:

Theorem 7: Individuals with the ability of empathy are more likely to be competent in intercultural communication than are individuals without the ability of empathy.

Theorem 8: Individuals with the ability of identity maintenance are more likely to be competent in intercultural communication than are individuals without the ability of identity maintenance.

Psychological adaptation deals with the ability of individuals to acclimate to a new culture. It is a complex process through which a person "acquires an increasing level of 'fitness' or

'compatibility' in the new cultural environment" (Kim & Gudykunst, 1988, p. 11). In other words, psychological adaptation refers to the general psychological well-being, self-satisfaction and contentment to a new environment. Many scholars have examined the process of psychological adaptation. For example, Lysgaard (1955) proposed the U-curve hypothesis to explain the three steps of psychological adaptation: initial adjustment, crisis, and regained adjustment. The initial adjustment stage has been the focus of the study since Lysgaard's hypothesis was provided. This stage is generally termed "cultural shock".

"Cultural shock", first coined by Oberg (1960), is concerned with individuals' initial experience or reaction during the first period of sojourning in a new culture. According to Oberg (1960) and Smalley (1963), the symptoms of cultural shock include washing hands excessively, fearing people, being absent-minded, being overly concerned with food and drinking, refusing to learn the host country's language and customs, and worrying about being robbed, cheated, or injured. There is no question but that, for competent people, these symptoms are just a temporary phenomenon that will be overcome after a short period of time. However, with less competent people, these symptoms could be a persistent nightmare until they return to their homeland. If the person cannot return home, the difficulty in cross-cultural adaptation may cause serious psychological or psychiatric problems such as schizophrenia, paranoiac depression, and lack of confidence (Yeh et al., 1981). This demonstrates the importance of being competent in adapting to

a new culture.

In general, psychological adaptation is typically associated with a person's ability to deal with situations such as frustration, stress, alienation and ambiguity caused by the host culture. That is, according to Furnham and Bochner (1982), psychological adaptation indicates how a person handles the "social difficulties." Furnham and Bochner's study has shown that social difficulties tend to increase when the difference between the host culture and the sojourner's culture becomes greater. The study further indicates that foreign students experience greater social difficulty than students of the host culture.

Ruben's (1976) study demonstrates that persons with high ambiguity tolerance show little visible discomfort, little confusion and little nervousness in a new environment. Moreover, high ambiguity tolerance persons can quickly adapt to the demands of the situation with "no noticeable personal, interpersonal, or group consequences" and can handle the changing environment rapidly and comfortably. This will, in turn, tend to eliminate the feelings of frustration, alienation and stress when sojourning in a new culture (Ruben & Kealey, 1979). In addition, Hammer (1987), Hammer, Gudykunst, and Wiseman (1978), and Wiseman and Abe (1986) indicate that the ability to deal with psychological stress in a new environment is one of the main elements accounted for by ICC. The ability includes to effectively deal with frustration, interpersonal conflict, pressure to conform, financial difficulties, social alienation, different political systems, and

anxiety. All these repeatedly show that a psychological well-adjusted person must be able to effectively handle the feelings of stress, frustration, alienation, and ambiguous situations in a new culture. In other words, effective psychological adaptation is a key variable for being competent in intercultural interaction. In sum, the key point is as follows:

Proposition 10: Individuals with the ability of psychological adaptation are more likely to be competent in intercultural communication than are individuals without the ability of psychological adaptation.

Four theorems can be derived from proposition 10 as follows:

Theorem 9: Individuals with the ability to deal with the feeling of stress caused by the new environment are more likely to be competent in intercultural communication than are individuals without the ability to deal with the feeling of stress.

Theorem 10: Individuals with the ability to deal with the feeling of frustration caused by the new environment are more likely to be competent in intercultural communication than are individuals without the ability to deal with the feeling of frustration.

Theorem 11: Individuals with the ability to deal with the feeling of alienation caused by the new environment are more likely to be competent in intercultural communication than are individuals without the ability to deal with the feeling of alienation.

Theorem 12: Individuals with the ability to deal with the ambiguous situation caused by the new environment are more likely to be competent in intercultural communication than are individuals without the ability to deal with ambiguous situation.

Cultural awareness refers to the understanding of variety in the host culture that affects how people think and behave. Oliver (1956) mentions that each culture shows different patterns of

thought. The problem that often arises in intercultural communication is the misunderstanding of thinking patterns. In other words, to be effective in intercultural interaction one must first learn the characteristics of the host culture, especially the thinking patterns. Hall (1959) and Hall and Whyte (1963) also indicates that understanding a host culture may lead sojourners to modify their communication patterns to be congruent with the cues of people of the host culture. The change of behavior to match the host culture is the key to reach mutual understanding.

Cultural awareness is similar to the idea proposed by Kluckhohn and Turner. Both scholars emphasize that knowledge of a culture is essential for effective intercultural communication. Kluckhohn (1948) asserts that cultural awareness requires a person to understand the "cultural map." According to Kluckhohn, culture is like a map, "if a map is accurate, and you can read it, you won't get lost; if you know a culture, you'll know your way around in the life of a society" (p. 28). Turner (1968) indicates that to be aware of a culture means to catch the "culture theme." The cultural theme is a thread that goes through a culture and organizes a culture as a recognizable system. It acts as a guideline to people's thinking and behavior, and is often reflected and repeated in the daily life.

The key components of a cultural map or a cultural theme that affect ICC include cultural values, social customs, and social system. Studies from Hall, Hall and Whyte, Kluckhohn, and Turner mentioned above have especially shown the important role that

cultural values play in the process of intercultural communication. Studies from Abe and Wiseman (1983), Chen (1989), Hammer, Gudykunst, and Wiseman (1978), and Martin (1987) have indicated that to be competent in intercultural interaction one has to understand the social customs and the social system of the host culture. To sum up, the key point is as follows:

Proposition 11: Individuals with a higher degree of cultural awareness are more likely to be competent in intercultural communication than are individuals with a lower degree of cultural awareness.

Three theorems can be derived from proposition 11 as follows:

Theorem 13: Individuals with an understanding of the host culture's values are more likely to be competent in intercultural communication than are individuals without an understanding of the host culture's values.

Theorem 14: Individuals with an understanding of the host culture's social customs are more likely to be competent in intercultural communication than are individuals without an understanding of the host culture's social customs.

Theorem 15: Individuals with an understanding of the host culture's social system are more likely to be competent in intercultural communication than are individuals without an understanding of the host culture's social system.

Problems and Prospects of the Study of ICC

Several challenges are presented in the study of ICC. The first challenge is that the conceptualization of ICC has grown more sophisticated. It is often confused with the definition of the term "competence." As mentioned earlier, argument still exists on the issue that competence is an inherent or a learned ability. Trying to answer this question, this paper has proposed that

competence should refer to the abilities of personality strength and communication skills. In other words, both inherent and learned abilities ("traits" and "states") should be considered and included. It would be futile to separate trait and state when conceptualizing competence.

Another problem for conceptualizing competence is the argument that competence refers to the interactant's knowledge or performance. Chomsky (1965) emphasizes that competence is simply "the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language" (p. 4). Phillips (1983) even differentiates the concepts of competence, skill, and effectiveness, and conceptualizes competence as "understanding situations and their requirements", skill as "demonstrated ability to meet requirements", and effectiveness as "the ability to accomplish specific goals" (p. 33). This classification shows that competence is just the first step for a person to communicate effectively. Both definitions of competence focus on the individuals' knowledge. The definitions suffer a certain degree of incompleteness, especially when considering that one gets involved in the process of communication in which one not only needs to demonstrate the knowledge of the situation but also the skills of behavior. This paper indicates that performance as well needs to be considered along with knowledge an element of ICC.

The final problem for conceptualizing competence is the confusion of effectiveness and competence. Many scholars (e.g., Hammer, Gudykunst, & Wisemann, 1978) use the term "effectiveness" instead of "competence". Others (e.g., Ruben, 1976, 1977; and

Ruben and Kealey, 1979) use "effectiveness" and "competence" interchangeably. This confusion needs to be crystalized in future studies. Obviously, using the term "competence" is preferable, especially in an intercultural communication setting. The previous discussion indicates that effectiveness is only one of the two variables for conceptualizing competence. Another variable "appropriateness" plays the same significant role. In other words, to be competent in intercultural interaction, individuals must communicate effectively and appropriately with their counterparts.

The second challenge is the operationalization of ICC. Two issues can be generated from this challenge. The first is what should be measured for ICC. This paper proposed four categories, including personality strength, communication skills, psychological adaptation, and cultural awareness, that can be used as guideposts for measuring ICC. However, for future study, it is necessary to discover more elements that account for ICC.

The second issue is how to measure ICC. To use a self-report scale, other-report scale or both is still a critical issue for communication scholars to pursue. Since ICC contains personality strength and behavioral skills, some would argue that it is more appropriate to operate both selfand other-report methods. Although use the both methods together may assure the external validity of the data, it will be difficult to bridge the discrepancy between the self- and other-report measures unless a more acceptable scale is created. Moreover, the problem is accelerated in intercutlural communication setting. For example, people from different cultures

may show different perceptions or attitudes toward the process of the study including items of the scale and the way to operate it.

The last challenge about the study of ICC is how many elements individuals must possess in order to be considered as "competent." To put another way, for example, is enough for individuals to possess the ability of communication skills to be competent, or must they possess other abilities such as personality strength, psychological adaptation, and cultural awareness? Communication scholars need to investigate whether the degree of ICC is affected by the number of competent elements or by some other measure. It will be provocative to examine this question, and furthermore, to investigate the interrelationships among those elements of ICC.

One final problem concerning the dimensions and components of ICC needs to be mentioned. Because the study of ICC is an interdisciplinary phenomenon, scholars from different fields might generate different dimensions and components of ICC. The dimensions and components of ICC covered in this paper represent the present writer's arbitrary decision. It is important to know that these dimensions and components are neither definitive nor exhaustive. Future research is encouraged to adopt a broader range of dimensions and components for the study of intercultural communication competence.

Conclusion

Since increased contacts between people from different cultures are inevitable at the present time, the study of ICC becomes critically important. Only through the ability of ICC can people

from different cultures communicate effectively and appropriately. This is why Sitaram and Cogdell (1976) proclaim that "all people of the world should study intercultural communication." Sitaram and Cogdell's sentiment is somewhat exaggerated, but it reflects the significance of learning more about people of other cultures. Certainly, ICC is the basis for reaching this goal.

Although the study of competence has a long history, it is still very new to consider competence from the intercultural standpoint. This paper attempts to organize some perspectives of ICC from the extant literature. The variable "competence" is conceptualized to fit to the intercultural setting. Major components of ICC are described. Propositions, problems and suggestions for future research concerning ICC are also discussed. It is hoped that the paper may help to develop a more coherent and consistent focus of inquiry in the field of ICC.

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